NGABONGKHAO

(THE FLESH



THE FLESH TRAP

A lyrical Tragi-comedy in 3 acts

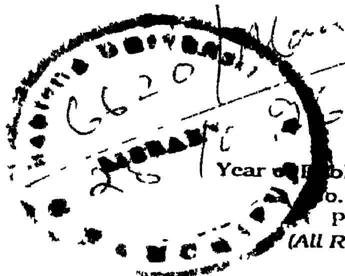
(English Translation of "Ngabongkhao" in Manipuri by the Play wright himself)

G.C. Tongbra
Segalambi,
Imphal

The Flesh Trap

(English Translation of "Ngabongkhao" by Tongbra himself)

is Published by
Kumari Mona Tongbram
Segalambi, Konjeng Hajari Leikai,
Imphal - 195001



Year of Publication : 1996 (February)
No. of Copies : 1000
Price : **Rs. 40/-**

Printed by :
Padma Printers (Computerised)
Paona Bazar, Imphal - 195001

Cover design by
Prof. Th. Tombi Singh

Foreword

The Manipuri Play **"Ngabongkhao"** *(The Flesh Trap)* was first written as a short play for performance by the Society Theatre, Manipur at the 1974 Session of the Cultural Forum, Manipur at the Aryan Theatre Hall, Imphal. The grand success of the performance induced me to write a continuation of the theme. I wrote the preceding event in another short play (now (Act I) and titled it "Leikang Patta Injingbee" (the fishing Lady of the dry lake). It was performed by the same Theatre troupe with tremendous applause from the learned spectators at the next annual session of the Cultural Forum, Manipur. The success again induced me to add another Piece (Act III) as a tail to make the body and head look like an organism. I retained the title "Ngabongkhao" of the first written short play (now Act II), but translated in English as the flesh trap to cover roughly the significance of all the three acts in the play.

In Act one R.K. Sanajaobi (Symbolising Corruption) Corrupts the public mind by her wayward ways. The bottom line in the act is; corrupt practices come home to roost.

The word Ngabongkhao literally means a coarse Chadar bag in Manipuri. It was in earlier days associated with packing up of anti social rogues to be thrown into the Barak river and is still an ana-thema to the ears of head-strong youths.

In the Act two artist Tomalo who ran away from the grip of Sanajaobi, was retrapped by her at Lakhipur, Cachar with such a bag. The bottom line in the Second Act is : Even a Small fry cant escape from her net.

In act three Tomalo returns to his roost as an old man to keep Sanajaobi's home. The bottom line is : Daydreaming is enough for the happiness of a weak-minded artist.

The full play Ngabongkhao was performed successfully by the Society Theatre, Manipur for more than one hundred times in different Parts. of Manipur and Assam in the 1970's. the playwright won Sahitya Academi award for this play in 1978.

The art and Culture Directorate, Government of Manipur has kindly favoured me with a financial assistance of Rupees ten thousand only towards the Printing charges of "Ngabongkhao" (The Flesh Trap in English), for which act of kindness I shall ever remain grateful.

Dated, Imphal :
The 6th February, 1996
(83rd Birth day)

G.C. Tongbra

Characters in the Play

1. R.K. Sanajaobi (a seductive lady)—below 40.
2. Tomalo (a singing tout kept by Do....) below 30.
3. Babahan (a shrewd friend of Do) below 30.
4. Dhanendra (S.D.O.) lanky 50.
5. Sukumar (Secretary) Pot belly 55
6. Kadam (a young brat) 20
7. Iboyaima (a rustic grocer) 40
8. Ibeton (Urbane wife of Do) 25
9. Subol (a rustic student) 25
10. Boyai (an arguer friend) 25
11. Jabanika (a lovely girl) 20
12. Indrani (her friend) 20
13. Gaunbura (a headman) 70
14. Beikuntha (a village elder) 65

Present Time

Act I and III at Imphal
Act II at Lakhipur, Cachar

NGABONGKHAO

(The Flesh Trap)

Act : 1—Scene : 1

It is a post Doljatra morning, on the road adjacent to Imphal Park.

In depressive mood enters Tomalo, a poor young artist holding a pen and an exercise book. He puts on a Pyjama and Kurta besmeared with colours.

Tomalo *(Thinks aloud)* : Doljatra in Manipur this year has just ended. I did not participate in playing colours, in singing holy song and in dancing in the moonlight. Imphal Park ! Did you see me ?

You did not, though, the house under lock and key marked it. I was left hanging like the lock. Am I dead or alive ? Young friends what epithet do I deserve – a young lock who had no role to play in the festivities of the Doljatra *(Waiting a while for any response).*

Yes, Yes, "living dead" a living lock hanging dead on the door.

(Moving forward 3 or 4 steps, he looks up and sees a pair of Khoining bird on the branch of a Kabuliya tree)

You, crested birds, don't sing here, just fly to the back of the house, the door of which I locked up. You will find the mulberry trees black with ripe fruits. The boyfriends of the old girl might have reached there earlier. Yes I see, the winged birds have flown away. Oh, Kabuliya tree, you are fastened on the ground by the roots and I am hung as a lock on the door – a prisoner forever. Oh heaven ! When shall I be freed ? Come earth-quake – break open the heart, make me the epicentre ? No need for crying like a Ting-gong-kangong (a bird), I should better sit down in meditation like the big stone boulders on the Baruni hills waiting for freedom from bondage.

(Sits down in meditation, his friend Babahan in similar dress stealthily enters and sits by his side imitating his posture).

Babahan : Dear Big Stone boulder on this Baruni Hill ! Have you found the God ?

Tomalo : I am not seeking God. What I want is a pair of bird wings.

Babahan : Then, let us collect feathers of bird as Daedalaws of Greece did, to make wings and fly to Lucknow. As Icarus did, I will follow you.

Tomalo : Have you learnt witch craft, Sorcery and black magic, Icarus?

Babahan : No, let us go to Lucknow and learn music from Orpheus.

Tomalo : Lucknow is too far, if the wax that fastensour wings, melts – won't we fall flat on the ground ?

Babahan : Then, we may continue the journey moving like a caterpillar. Your crab-habit of moving backward will lead you only to the dirty pot-hole.

(Sanajaobi in sky-blue Sari and butterfly colour Chadar appears stealthily and overhears their talk)

Tomalo : Friend Babahan, are you determined to fly heavenward ?

Babahan : The land is dear on earth Sir, The girls refuse to hold my hand in the moonlight dance.

Tomalo : Don't bother, friend; you emit the fragrance of an old quack.

Babahan : How longer will you stand as a scarecrow at the door of moonlight dance room ? You relish the smell of essence, the noise of wild dance rhythm ?

Tomalo : Let us run away when the festive mood dies down.

Babahan : Festivities in Manipur never dry up. If you really will, let us fly away today or tomorrow itself.

Sanajaobi : Where are you fleeing to ?

(Both of them look back, nonplussed at seeing her, they crawl on all fours)

Roh – Roh – Halt ! Stand up as men. *(They obey, turn away their faces when she glances at them.)*

Sanajaobi : Where are you fleeing to, Babahan ? What do you mean by a scarecrow at the door of moonlight dance room ? Give

me the answer straight.

Babahan : I asked him to order a book of songs from Lucknow. He has a good voice and he would better sing and lead the moonlight dance party, instead of standing silent as a scarecrow.

Sanajaobi : You are fooling me, a stupid liar. Have you sent the boy to school, Tomalo ?

Tomalo : Yes madam, I did.

Sanajaobi : I asked you to see Dhanendra, S.D.O. What did he say ?

Tomalo : He would leave for Jiri tomorrow at 10.00 a.m. Wanted you to wait for him on the road side.

Sanajaobi : What about the other one, Sukumar, the Secretary ? What did he say ?

Tomalo : He said— he would come, but gave no fixed time.

Sanajaobi : Why sir, you are so foolish ? Is not time an important factor? If at the same time two cars arrive to occupy the same parking place area, will not they collide, Tangang (R.K.'s husband) ?

Tomalo : Why Tangang to ridicule me, Lady ? Am I your Lord ? How long should I continue living single in these days of parking room scarcity ?

Sanajaobi : Why should you seek a new bride ? I am here by your side, Babahan, you please don't divert the mind of my man and lead him astray. Rather, split up your companionship please.

Babahan : In the days, long long ago, time moved slowly and steadily, but now the price of everything rises up as shamelessly as the Thongjaorock river in the rainy season delinquently overflows its banks. Some of our friends who lighted torches at night after the break up of Khwairamband bazar for picking of stray penny or paise, have now become contractors driving motor cars, some have become M.L.A.'s who make gold filtering sandy water of the Imphal river, some have grown long hair to become film artistes. Sand Collector, street labour, weavers and farmers like us, are getting suffocated with

the corrupted dust of the time. Sister Rajkumari, we must flee away from this cursed land.

Sanajaobi : You alone flee away, leaving Tangang.

Babahan : In these stormy days a dry bamboo bark alone must not travel, I should keep company with Tangang, a lump of earth. When the wind blows the lump of earth would sit up on me, the bark and when it rains the bark would cover the lump of earth.

Sanajaobi : Your Tangang is not made of earth, but of steel, like the bell of a bicycle – the bell.

Tom (Sings): Yea, a steel bell am I,
The bell of the bicycle
(a bell rings)
The thumb presses on me
a worn out bell
On the bike they ride – ding dong bell
Hip Hip, Hurrah !
Off with you, men, I say (a bell rings)
Today I am in command, the cycle bell
This dog barks, it is my home
Oh, thieving cat, go back home.
(a man imitates a cat's call—"Miaow"
Don't you hear wild cat ?
why shoe steps in the dark tick-tack-toe !
Enters the back-door, dives into darkness
Wow wow, wow !
I am the cycle bell.

(Tomalo stands as a statue, Babahan claps hands)

Sanajaobi : In the devastating flood of this time, all men are crying S.O.S. : what should we eat ? What should we wear ? How longer could we live ? Even men in power and bureaucrats are, in fear of the future, making oil out of complaints sent up in the air. The reason why is scarcity of oil on earth now, food product is dwindling, man has to snatch food from man's mouth, man might even kill man for his flesh if there is no other means. To be alive in these circumstances

Tangang Tomalo is playing the role of a cycle bell, Babahan, will you play the role of a cycle tyre ?

Babahan : In the sun and in the rains, on the rough ground and on the shingled roads the tyre has to trudge, that would be a tiring job. What I am seeking is an easy job like that of a cycle pump.

Sanajaobi : You seek to exploit gullible fools. They are no more now. If you want to live by your wit, you have to establish some tradition. It is through the grace of old tradition that we women live idly as the confident maid servants of bullocks that draw carts.

Babahan : No idling now, madam. Even the girls seek jobs in the Police Department.

Sanajaobi : What is your purpose of stealing from me, Tangang the bell ?

Babahan : If I get the bell, as I am a pump, we can assemble a bike.

Sanajaobi : Come on Babahan, let us pay a visit to the Police Station.

Babahan : I am sorry, I hate telling lies. Friends, I am leaving – let us keep the resolution – on an auspicious day — Eh ?

Tomalo : Yes, of course ....

Sanajaobi : Why should, you leave me alone ? What bothers you ? Tell me.

Tomalo : I can't stand the sultry weather. Kindly release me from this voluptuous bondage.

Sanajaobi : Prone as I am to accident without your help, I might be destroyed in one. Would you like it ? What I have been planning to catch the wild elephants, cannot be achieved without the help of a trained mahut like your good self.

Tomalo : Excuse me, Rajkumari, I want freedom.

Sanajaobi : That cannot be allowed Tangang. Logic cannot cut off our affectionate tie. I loved you to accompany me in our old age to a pilgrimage to Brindaban. (She pretends to be serious).

(Dhanendra S.D.O. in suit tie, holding a suit case – enters and looks at them standing, Sanajaobi covers her head with the chadar to show her regards).

Dhanendra: Tomalo, you called at my house in the morning and inquired about the stupid animal. If the elephant arrives, would he be engaged in drawing out wood from the jungle, eh ?

Tomalo : Might be promoted to a king of the jungle, I don't know, sir.

Sanajaobi : Just say : The elephant shall dive into the Parsuram Pool to turn into a gentleman.

Tomalo : It is said that an elephant turns into a gentleman after diving into the Parsuram Pool.

Dhan : Believing what was said, I played the role of a buffalo weltering in dirty water pond only to catch cold, now I am leaving for Jiribam to serve there as an elephant S.D.O.

Tomalo : What should I say, water lily ?

Sanajaobi : Whether for gambling in the Jiri jungle or for chorabazar in Churachandpur, one may wish to go, one must pay for the child's food, dress and education.

Dhan : Mothers of birds and animals teach their Young ones; if money is necessary in the case of man, the father would pay by ploughing the field like a buffalo or drawing wood from the forest like an elephant. What should the mother do Tomalo? (shouts)

Tomalo : To the bazar mother should go with a fishing net.

Sanajaobi : Is there any fishing ground in the bazar, stupid?

Tomalo : There are pan shops in front of the Cinema Halls.

Dhan : If the mother with a fishing contrivance, moves hither and thither on the half deserted roads to catch flying fishes, would the child left at home, mind its study? What do you think Tomalo?

Tomalo : The hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world.

Sana : Without an affectionate father to take after as a model, how can a little boy grow up tall, Tomalo? Should a son loving father desert the mother and run away, Tomalo?

Tomalo : Right you are, Rajkumari. If the good of the child is intended, the parents like a pair of doves perching on the same branch of a tree, bill and coo the

welfare of their little one.

Dhan : If the mother puts on a blouse of butterfly wings and soars up in the air with a hawk's wings to catch her prey, what father can remote-control her hungry jaws? Poachers all, beware of "the Ides of March"! Just now I am flying to Jiribam.

(Flaps his hands and moves away. Sana overtakes him and holds his shoulder).

Sanajaobi : Mr. Deserter, Sir, you are defaulting maintenance grant. The mission schools are raising fees.

Dhan : Hands off, I am allergic to your touch. (pays Rs. 200). Old men like me love blooming roses, but they fear the thorns.

Sanajaobi : Please avoid the tip of the thorn, my beloved boole. When will you return and see me? Give me a date fixed. I shall be waiting for your return as the Jakha's wife in the Meghadoot, did at Alkapur.

Dhan : I am old, don't do like that. Rather hold a knife in your hand as Clitemnestra did in waiting for the return of King Agamemnon from the Trojan War, Miss Rose. Straighten your crooked thorn, it is my warning : I will pay a surprise visit to you, if I find anything wrong. The kite shall lose its string for good. (goes away).

Sanajaobi : If I can keep 10 such earning buffaloes – Tangang Tomalo – (shows two one hundred rupee notes).

Tomalo : Two hundred ten is two thousand a month. But the crows will caw in concert and the flies will swarm.

Sanajaobi : Let the crows caw and the flies swarm, it is the nature of the spring season. But you and I must breathe utilising all the resources at our command. The hurdle race of the time is running. If you and I fall into a drainage canal, who will pull us up?

Tomalo : Instead of pulling us up, they may announce a buffet meal to the fishes.

Sanajaobi : To give the fishes better meal, we should eat to our heart's content and should never starve to save dying social morality.

Tomalo : It is upto one's moral virtue, madam.

Sanajaobi : Would you pocket this money, partner?

Tomalo : No madam, that will make me restless.

Sanajaobi : A good boy, come on, let us catch a spotted deer.

Tomalo : Should we go to Keibul-Lamjao?

Sanajaobi : No sir, in this town itself many a discontented animal turn out loose, if we meet them in good time and place, we can catch them for profitable uses.

Tomalo : How do you find an animal amidst men?

Sanajaobi : Man turns into animal. Through some ill luck, he maybe forced to become one, he can hurt with his horn, bite with his teeth. If properly trained, he can be employed in the circus ring.

Tomalo *(Surprised)* : What animal did you catch me for?

Sanajaobi : I caught you as a bear to teach you dancing. Now you are promoted to Ringmastership to train other animals newly recruited.

Tomalo : Do you know any jantar mantar to bewitch big bulls?

Sanajaobi : Why not? I am a man charmer.

Tomalo : Babahan is seeking for such a charm. Would you please teach him some?

Sanajaobi : No, I cannot teach him. He might take you away from me. Come on, let us seek Sukumar Secretary.

Tomalo : Most huntresses want to keep only one pet animal. Why do you want to catch so many?

Sanajaobi : The more, the merrier – Ringmaster! who among the capitalists, are content after earning 2 or 3 lacs of Rupees? Only after death a man is content with 5 mds of fuel.

(Enters Sukumar Secretary in suit and tie and a pair of glasses holding a bazar bag, standing at the centre of the stage.)

Sukumar : Where are my specs? I opened the files, bewildered with the confusing statements – left the specs on the file – (bothers a while) – No I have brought a file – (raising the bag) – It is not a file but a bazar bag! Where are the specs then? (finding with his hand) Sorry, it is on my eyes. Why

am I so upset and forgetful? Am I worrying over acceptance of some bribes?

Kadam *(running)* : Oh, Secretary Sahib, please wait a while.

(The shabbily dressed young man falls down dog tired-at the feet of the Secretary.)

Sukumar : Are you the brat calling me from behind?

Kadam : Who will he be? If I am not.

Sukumar : Who are you?

Kadam : Don't you know me, sir?

Sukumar : Why should I know you?

Kadam : How did a fool like you become a Secretary?

Sukumar : A rat like you calls me a fool?

Kadam : I am the man who called you from behind. I ran after you from the residential gate.

Sukumar : What is your name?

Kadam : I have many names, (stands up) does not your good wife tell you my name.

Sukumar : Why should she tell me your bad name?

Kadam : I presented a big pot of fishes to her, don't you eat even one?

Sukumar : I did not.

Kadam : If she ate all the fishes alone, she deserves the kingfisher medal.

Sukumar : Are you insulting my wife on the highway?

Kadam : No sir, I am praising her might. My name is not only Ngakramacha – I presented to her two hundred rupee notes, fresh and clean, does not she pay you even one?

Sukumar : No, I don't know anything about that.

Kadam : Then she must be a stony deity.

Sukumar : You are ridiculing me and my good wife on the street, do you want confinement in the Police lock-up? Don't you know who I am?

Kadam: I am here today sir, for getting acquainted with you. I don't like Police lock-up, what I want is getting me appointed as a Police personnel - which you must, sir.

Sukumar : You approach me for getting an appointment and you

speak ill of my wife in my face. How can I appoint a mad man like you as a Police Personnel?

Kadam : I am not speaking ill of her, sir, I am only praising her, sir.

Sukumar : No, I cannot make you a Policeman.

Kadam : You must sir, your good wife, Bhabee told me that I should surely get the appointment, sir.

Sukumar : Does your bhabee control me?

Kadam : She accepted gladly the fish and the money. She also told me that women control men – though not openly, sir.

Sukumar : Then go to your bhabee and ask for the appointment.

Kadam : The fish and the money were meant for you - to please you, sir.

Sukumar : I don't take them, I cannot be obliged that way.

Kadam : But you must make me a Police, sir.

Sukumar : Why should I?

Kad am: The fish was bought on credit, sir and the money was also borrowed, sir, from a relative on the confidence that I will become a Policeman and will pay off with due interest, sir. (Sukumar smiles a little). Not only that my mother has also engaged a girl for marriage with me. Her mother approved the proposal trusting that I am surely getting the appointment.

Sukumar : What is your name?

Kadam : My name is Kadam allies Kwathang (knife), sir.

Sukumar : Why kwathang? (surprised)

Kadam : As I am always seen with a knife, they call me kwathang, sir. (brings out a knife).

Sukumar (Started) : Yes, you see me at home in the evening, let me consult with my wife also.

Kadam : Please do not put it off, sir, I have been waiting since the last X-Mass. Mother has finalised an engagement for my marriage, missing the job will be death to me, sir.

Sukumar : Who will bother if you die? Anyone or everyone cannot become a policeman.

Kadam : I won't die alone sir, I will kill another to accompany me, sir.

Sukumar : Whom will you kill?

Kadam : He or She that ate my fishes and pocketed the two hundred rupee notes, sir.

Sukumar : Your rupees two hundred plus the price of the fishes shall be refunded. See me tomorrow, off with you, it is getting late.

Kadam : I won't accept sir, any refund less than the job. (Raising the knife)

(Sanajaobi runs in to prevent Kadam's attack, Sukumar trembles in fright).

Sanajaobi (standing between them) : What makes you so angry my boy? Make no haste, there is enough time. It is broad daylight – on the main road, calm down. (To Sukumar) What is the matter sir ? Are you out of mind ?

Sukumar : No, that is a strange rogue. He says that he has presented a pot of fishes and rupees two hundred to my wife at home. Now he threatens to kill me if I do not appoint him as a policeman to-day.

Kadam : Why should I not threaten sir ? My mother has finalised an engagement for my marriage on the hope that I will become a policeman. Just see my position, auntie please.

Sanajaobi : Call me Sanaibema, I am a Rajkumari, yes.

Kadam : Sorry, Sanaibema, the fishes were bought on credit, the money was also borrowed by mother. Please try to understand me. Is it not better for me to commit suicide - after killing him, if he will not make me a policeman.

Sanajaobi : Yes brother, right you are. I will make you get appointed, don't bother. Just bow down at the feet of your brother-in-law. I am your sister. (Pats on his head)

Kadam (bowing down) : Excuse me brother-in-law sir, save my life. (bowing down to Sana & placing Rs. 50/- at her feet) I will never forget you sister Sanaibema.

Sanajaobi (holding up the Rs. 50/- note) : Why this rupees 50/-?

Kadam : That is my marriage insurance fee, madam. (bow clasping two palms)

Sanajaobi : God bless you boy (pockets the money). (To Sukumar)

Please love him sir.

Sukumar : Go home, you may attend the police office from tomorrow.

Kadam : Yes sir. (Salutes like a policeman.) Thank you. (march off in police gait)

Sanajaobi : Sir, it is long since you gave me a darshan. Are you quite fine now?

Sukumar : You have so many big fishes as bosom friends. Have you any vacant room in your mind to accommodate my poor image?

Sanajaobi : My good Gods! How many times have I sent Tomalo to see your good self. Every time he returns with the same answer, "very busy, no leisure". Have you no soft corner for the little boy?

Sukumar : There is no father who does not love his son, but the question that often haunts my mind is "Am I the real father of the boy?'

Sanajaobi : Why and how do you doubt that ugly boy who takes so much after his father? (Laughing) He is so prone to tantrum and so miserly selfish that he is his father himself, sir.

Sukumar : As I must love the ugly son, I have been sending rupees one hundred a month. As the mother is beautiful I would like to accompany her in the evening walk as a rose in my coat pocket.

Sanajaobi : That is the why you appear only in the summer as a silk cater-pillar.

Sukumar : As you have a big entourage I am afraid I may be thrown out as husk of grain.

Sanajaobi : We need not talk by words of mouth, let us do instead by deeds. Can you spare a leisure hour to-night or tomorrow night?

Sukumar : I won't tell you the time, am I a thief? I will pay a surprise visit.

Sanajaobi : I don't care, please call at any time. Please clear the monthly dues.

Sukumar : The brat paid you Rs. 50/-

Sanajaobi : That was Insurance premium. (they laugh) I want the ugly boy's school fees.

Sukumar : This is the ugly boy's fees. (pay Rs. 100/-)

Sanajaobi : Thank you. (They move away together)

(Ibeton, 35 years old woman in traditional Manipuri dress, with a bunch of keys tied to the end of her chadar and carrying a bag of sweets, moves briskly followed by her husband, 40 years old, in simple Dhotee and Kurta with an umbrella tucked in the armpit and sect marks on the forehead)

Iboyai : Wait a while, Ibeton - wait a minute, I say.

Ibeton *(Without looking back, stops)* : I won't wait, I don't like to wait.

Iboyai *(Standing in front of her and looking closely)* : Where are you going to in a luxurious fashion - in hurried steps?

Ibeton : I am calling at the parental home.

Iboyai : You have locked up all the doors of the shop and carrying all the keys to the parental home. What is the motive behind?

Ibeton : I have suddenly remembered a heart-ache event of my girl-hood, please don't ask me about it.

Iboyai : Why should I not ask you?

Ibeton : It might hurt your mind.

Iboyai : Never mind, say at once.

Ibeton : If I return home after divorcing from you, a very beautiful youth will gladly welcome me home. I wish to get married with him.

Iboyai : What should I do then?

Ibeton : Being a shopkeeper, why should you sell on credit so many goods to young ladies, of our neighbourhood? They are not poor widows either.

Iboyai : Yes, you mean Thambaltombi and Leihao Leiren and - ?

Ibeton : You select one of them as your wife, and say Talaq 3 times to me as Muslims do for divorce.

Iboyai : What do you mean? They both have their own husbands.

Ibeton : Why do you allow them to continue buying on credit before they clear their old dues? If their husbands get the

smell of it, will not they burn up the shop? Before they put the shop on fire, I will find a young smart salesman to keep the shop in tact. You may get hatched up with a gipsy girl.

Iboyai (Now coming to his sense) : Don't you regard me as a husband Ibeton?

Ibeton : Why should I, if you don't regard me as a wife either.

Iboyai : Then you don't return to me - Talaq, Talaq, Talaq. I will pluck one rose from the roadside - so many disgruntled flowers are floating on the flood of time.

Ibeton : Yes, you pick up a whore from the dusty road, one should not live together with a faithless fickle fellow. I don't believe you will ever buy a gold necklace for me.

Iboyai : There are so many simple women who are content if at least they are fed to their fill. To be too good to woman is inviting to be henpecked. It is truly said that a homesick person is not respected by his wife. Handover the keys, go homeward as you please.

Ibeton : If I hand over the keys to you, the goods in the grocery shop will be vanished in no time on credit. First find a woman as saleswoman and wife and I will get the goods divided between two of us.

Iboyai : (Looking affectionately a while in silence) Yes, Ibeton, are you leaving me for sure – ?

Ibeton : I am not made of cheap stuff. If I ask you to buy a gold chain for a locket, you put it off month after month. But if some young women demand goods on credit, you are so glad to oblige them, Please find a smart young saleswoman as your wife. I will return in 10 days, we shall then get the score settled with you.

Iboyai : Where will you stay those ten days ?

Ibeton : At home, parental home, I will get a gold chain of five tolas made for the locket. (goes away)

Iboyai : (Looking from behind) A woman who looks ugly at home, becomes beautiful on separation. What should I do? From what looks like – in lighter vein –! Now the price of gold is

rupees two thousand per tola – 5 tolas rupees 10 thousand! (Sit down calculating & bothering, when Sanajaobi with a bazar bag full of fish and vegetables returns, seeing him, she stops and enquires).

Sanajaobi : Young man, I feel as if I have seen you earlier somewhere, what bothers you? Your name – what is it ?

Iboyai : Good sister, my name is Iboyaima – the botheration is over my wife – a wayward woman.

Sanajaobi : Call me "Echemsi", I am a Rajkumari. Are you not an official of the D.C. Court, at Lamphel ?

Iboyai : Echemsi, I am a shopkeeper in the bazar.

Sanajaobi : Yes I see, I have seen you in a new handloom shop at the Khwairamband bazar.

Iboyai : I am a shopkeeper of Lamlong Bazar. You might have seen me while I was buying some clothes.

Sanajaobi : On yes, that might be the cause. What makes you say that a wayward woman bothers you ?

Iboyai : Echemsi, being a little pitiful by nature I look like a simpleton, a young beautiful woman who happens to be the wife of a gambler, comes to buy on credit rice, dal, oil, cigarettes and what not from our shop, I obliged her in sympathy and the account shoots up to Rs. 200/300. My wife has detected the account and told me whereas I am unwilling to buy a gold chain of 5 tolas for her locket, why should I be so liberal to the gambler's wife. So saying angrily she left for her parental home. How should I say to the other woman that for her sake my wife left me alone ?

Sanajaobi : However beautiful the credit worthy woman has a gambler husband!

Iboyai : Yes Echemsi, she is very beautiful like your good self though. Now I have to cook my own food – I have made myself a fool – by losing both of them.

Sanajaobi : Iboyaima, nowadays the Burmese eat snakes, the snakes eat frogs, the frogs eat mosquitoes, the mosquitoes suck

men's blood. It is now customary to exploit any situation for one's own benefits. Don't bother, let bygones be bygones. Take your lunch with me at my home and I will show you some deserving nymphs.

Iboyai : Thank you madam, let it be so in praise of Lord Krishna. (The two gladly move together. Ibeton overheard their talk, followed them).

Ibeton : Wait a minute please. Do you hear ?

Iboyai : Who is calling ? (Looks back) Let us go, madam.

Ibeton : Just wait a minute, sir, We have to carry a load together.

Iboyai (to Sanajaobi) : Please go Echemsi. I will turn up in the evening.

Sanajaobi : Let us meet at the foot of the old hump backed bridge of the Khwairamband Bazar.

Iboyai : Yes, madam, positively. (Sanajaobi goes off) What are the goods to be carried ?

Ibeton : There are cheap potatoes, we should buy 2 sacks to sell.

Iboyai : Are we to continue shop-keeping together ? No separation ?

Ibeton : Why should we separate ? That will be boring.

Iboyai : I told the lady that we have got divorced and asked her to procure a good looking young sales – woman for my shop.

Ibeton : That tiger snake, my God! It is said that she catches fools like you for her dinner salad. Don't dare to meet her again.

Iboyai : Does that lady possess some charms ?

Ibeton : What did she say in privacy ?

Iboyai : I told her I would call upon her in the evening. She told me to see her at the foot of the hump-backed bridge of the Khwairamband Bazar.

Ibeton : Would you go to ? do you like to have a tryst with the tiger snake ?

Iboyai : I gave my word. Don't you like me to go ?

Ibeton : That you want to go to her is proof of her wearing a charm. You may go if you want. But I warn you that the hump-backed bridge is, after sunset, a haunting place of devils, if you happen to meet one at night, the chance of your survival will be remote. If you dare death and go to

see her, as I don't like to become a widow, I would go to the young smart gentleman I met in the fish market, who proposed to buy 2 tickets for a get – together in the Cinema Hall.

Iboyai : Shame! It is said that sitting together of a man and a woman in the Cinema Hall, is very bad, don't go. What is that youth whom you met in the fish market ?

Ibeton : He is an expert in goldsmithy. Had I been wearing a 5 tola gold chain locket on my neck, the bazar would have been flood–lit, at night without electric bulb, he said. (laughs).

Iboyai : If the market so desires, you have to attend the market as an electric post everyday. Say "NO" to the proposal, the tube lights in the streets at night are swarmed by a million of flying insects.

Ibeton : Gold from your pocket will not take the trouble of the lighting, sir.

Iboyai : Did the goldsmith agree to pay the price of the gold from his pocket ?

Ibeton : Yes, of course, but during the period of making the gold chain I must go everyday to flood light their workshop for an hour or so.

Iboyai : If the wife of the goldsmith throws a stone at the dazzling tube light – that hurts her eye sight.

Ibeton : His wife is no more on earth.

Iboyai : Did he not ask you if you have any husband rich or poor ?

Ibeton : I told him I have a husband who hesitates to buy a 5 tola gold chain. He advised me to get divorced from the fool.

Iboyai : Did he call me a fool ?

Ibeton : If you don't like to be a fool, become a wise man.

Iboyai : How can I become a wise man, Ibeton ?

Ibeton : If you want to be wise, buy a gold chain for the locket.

Iboyai : Come on then, if 5 tolas of gold can turn a fool into a wise man. (move away together – (left) under the shade of the umbrella).

(Enter Babahan and Tomalo from right)

Babahan : Dear Tomalo, how longer will the sun continue shining ?

Tomalo : Yes, it is long since Sanajaobi was flying me as a kite.

Babahan : One man is exploited by another through love of inordinate gain. such a greed is aptly personified by Sanajaobi, the symbol of corruption.

Tomalo : Every woman is a Sanajaobi with a difference. They have power as well as weakness in differing degrees.

Babahan : For the sake of woman, man quarrels with parents, brothers and friends.

Tomalo : Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden through Eve's weakness. Sita was kidnapped by Ravana and Lanka was burnt to ashes. Dishonour to Draupadi caused the complete destruction of the Kauravas. Dear Babahan, I hate woman most.

Babahan : Look here, my dear, some women are like serpents that carry in their mouth a bright gem which shines at night and attracts frogs to be gobbled by her. To feed fat these serpents all the wealth of the world is accumulated in some hands only and all others like you and me are turned into bonded labour or beggars. All sorts of corruptions in the world are bred by them. So, we should weed them out of our society. I propose to sacrifice Sanajaobi first for the good of mankind, what do you think ?

Tomalo : I am sorry, I can't kill her. Instead of killing her, I should rather run away. Out of sights, she would be out of mind.

Babahan : She is a poisonous snake, a devil's disciple.

Tomalo : As she has been giving me free board and lodging for some years, my conscience will not permit me to raise a knife on her.

Babahan : Then we are no more than cowards, unwilling to do any good to the land.

Tomalo : I can't think of doing any harm to her.

Babahan : I understand you love Sanajaobi, you love the shackles that bind you, love the yoke that festers your neck ?

Tomalo : That is the destiny of underlings like us. We are still addicted to timid living.

(Sings the song, Babahan on all fours picturising the bull)

The Song :

The country roads cry with the trudging wheels,
Oh, you, cart drawing bullocks,
Throw away the yoke
That festers your neck
your blood the flies suck.
The flying birds in pity say,
Flee away Mr. Bull, to fresh pasture
Erect your ears, raise your tail
Jump over the hurdles sir,
The green fields call you to feast.
The trees on the roadside wonder
Why you love the yoke so dearly
That will bleed you to death, sure;
Don't you hear bullock dear ?
The cow is lowing in free air.

Tomalo + Babahan (Imitating Bulls) : Mo – Mo!

— *Light Off* —

Act : 1—Scene : 2

Sanajaobi's bedroom – Night – Dressing table, Chairs, Flower pots, a well decorated bed, under which there is an empty and open drum (petrol), the room is brightly lighted. Some glasses and a squash bottle are also seen on the badside table. There is a cloth stand on the right side of the bed. Sanajaobi is combing hair at the dressing table.

Tomalo *(appears & sings in the down stage left corner)*

Halo Madam ! It is dusk at the gate door,
A small Fry turns up timidly.
He is seeking admission shyly
Oh fishing lady of the dry lake!
To catch or not to catch
That is your wish ?

Sanajaobi *(Sings back at down stage right corner)* :

Oh, lake keeper !
Catch the fry however small
Show him in at once,
(She dances a pose in joy. Tomalo gets off.
Iboyaima in simple dhuti and shirt with sect mark on the forehead enters from the left wing)

Iboyaima : Excuse me madam. Is not this the hump-backed bridge ?

Sanajaobi (smiling) : Yes, of course, (offers a chair)—Please rest here. Would you please have tea or coffee ?

Iboyaima : Thank you, a drop of Sekmai liquor in a glass of water will do for me.

Sanajaobi : *(She pours orange squash into a glass of water & offers to him).* Is that lady who arrested you from the road that day, a police officer ?

Iboyaima : No madam. She is my cup of country liquor (looking around). It seems that your highness lives in a grand

foreign liquor style.

Sanajaobi : No sir, it is all lemon squash.

Iboyaima : Where can I see the photo picture of nymphs I desired that day?

Sanajaobi : Yes, you may see here itself. If you will not mind, I myself can play the role of any nymph.

Iboyaima : *(Shakes hand and jumps up)* Thank you madam, that is open sesame to Heaven's door. It is rightly said that nothing venture nothing have. *(They look at each other's face for some seconds silently).*

Sanajaobi : In these days heroes venture to kidnap Draupadies, to loot Kuber's banks, to involve in clandestine love affairs or guerrilla warfares. Why ? Because, the reward, if successful is fantastic!

Iboyaima : Sensational heart throb-ecstasy, forgetting family fires and furies.

Sanajaobi : It is bliss, freedom from pain and care of the external world. It is , so to say, a cheap edition of Nirvana for modern heroes and heroines.

(Suddenly Tomalo's warning song from outside is heard, a surprise to Iboyaima).

Hal - lo - o !
Fishing lady of the dry lake
How now madam ?
The hell is up here.
The bully of a fish
With erect fins
Knock hard at the gate door.
To catch or not to catch
That is your wish ?

Sanajaobi *(Sings back)* :

O - h - o - Lake keeper !
Miss him not, catch the bull and show him in.

Iboyaima (alarmed) : What is the matter ?

Sanajaobi : Nothing, but a bit of heart throb.

(Ask him to stand like the statue of a boxer on the right of

centre stage).

Please come here—*(She pretends to hypnotise him by passing her right palm on his face, utters the following words)* Turn at once into a marble boxer !

(Iboyai stands in an attacking pose)

(Sukumar in suit, tie, specs enters and looks around in doubt).

Sukumar (after silence of 30 seconds) : Excuse me. May I ask a question, madam ?

Sanajaobi : Yes, please Mr. Forgetful ?

Sukumar : If I remember correctly, I think there grew a sweet Ketuki flower plant in this locality, I cannot find it now. I don't know if I have entered in a wrong garden !

Sanajaobi : Attracted by the sweet scent of the Ketuki flower a cobra also coils around waiting up in the garden. Yes, it is that place.

Sukumar : No, it cannot be that place, the Ketuki flower, I mean has no thorns on it nor any cobra coiling around.

Sanajaobi : That does not matter. In the course of time thorns may grow up and snakes may coil in to wait up Yes, it is the place. Please sit down on the chair or stretch yourself on the bed.

Sukumar : The living may grow up or come up. From the dead I should solicit information. Mr. Chair, do you know me ? You do ! Are you sure ? —Yes.

(Sits down on it and gets up startled immediately)

What is it that pinches my bottom ?

Sanajaobi : It might be the bugs kissing hungrily after a long break. Please rest on the bed, I am fetching tea. (Goes off).

Sukumar *(Rolling a while on the bed)* : What a pillow are you ? Is there any needle for embroidery work ? Oh, you are. *(Gets up and walks round the statue, knocks lightly with the middle finger—touches the hands (shaking)—the head turns away and questions).*

Of what stuff is this figure made of ? Have I seen through the wrong side of the glasses ? *(check the glasses)* Why

should I see so many improbable images ? Since all lifeless things can talk, I shall enquire. Mr. Image of a boxer, what are you made of, please ?

Iboyai : I am made of sand stone.

Sukumar : Oh, I see! Since it can talk, it must be dead stone. Oh you, Mr. Dead Stone, what were you in your past life ?

Iboyaima *(Pitifully)* : I was a shopkeeper.

Sukumar : By whose curse are you turned into sand stone ?

Iboyaima : Sattee Ibeton's curse.

Sukumar : Who was Sattee Ibeton ? (in pathetic voice) In what purana was she canonised ?

Iboyaima : In my former life she was my wife.

Sukumar : What was the underlying cause that made the Sattee curse her husband ?

Iboyaima : In the debit and credit accounts of our shop, a gambler's wife erased some debit accounts which I connived at.

Sukumar : Did she tell you anything about the end of the cursed period ?

Iboyaima : Yes, the end will come when I complete one full month standing as a stone statue at the feet of the Ketuki flower, 2 hours every evening. *(wipes out tears).*

(Sanajaobi comes out with 2 cups of tea and delivers one cup to each)

Sanajaobi *(Lectures)* : Whatever happens on earth was predicted in the ancient puranas. The people of Ayyodhya doubted the chastity of Sita, for she resided amidst the rakshasas of Lanka for some months. In consequence, the untainted Lady had to bring up 2 sons against odds in the hermitage of Balmiki. (Places tea cups near the two) due to the easily angered Saint Durbassa's curse innocent Sakuntala had to bring up her son in the snow clad mountain hermitage. So a wise man is not afraid of pineaple skin nor is doubtful of jackfruit skin. Woman like me may secrete nectar from the heart.

Sukumar *(Shouting aloud)* : What should I, a Shakespeare's Othello do now ? Should I or should not I throttle the neck of

Desdemona to kill her. (The shouting started Iboyaima who trembles in fear) Cashio ! Would you like to live or die ? (to Iboyaima)

(Off stage : Tomalo sings aloud the following message)

Oh - o - o
Fishing Lady of the dry lake.
    Clean hearted Sattee,
How now would you counter
    A hell up of a job
A shark has turned up with a bang
    Gaping his saw-toothed jaws
    To catch or not to catch
    That is your wish ?

Sanajaobi *(Sings with fishing gestures)* :

Oh you, keeper of the dry lake !
Never mind, whatever betides,
Drive him not away, sir
Catch him and show him in.

Iboyai trembles with fear, Sukumar is surprised, Sanajaobi carelessly dances collecting fishes from the net; when Dhanendra in Pyzama, overcoat, felt hat enters with a stick in one hand and a bazar bag in the other, Iboyaima hides entering into the empty drum drawn out from under the bed. Sukumar turns himself into a marble statue of a boxer as Iboyaima did earlier. Dhanendra looks around angrily, drops the bazar bag, moves around threateningly—sits on the drum rolling it—

Dhanendra : Sanajaobi achoubi ! Rajkumari !

Sanajaobi : Yes sir, your highness ?

Dhanendra : How do I look like ?

Sanajaobi : You are, sir, as beautiful as a basketful of paddy with a fine garland of fermented fishes round the neck.

Dhanendra : What a market place is it ? Is it a week-day hat of Assam ?

Sanajaobi : It is the temple town of Hiyangthang Deity, dear devotee ! Concentrate your mind on Mrs. Radhika not on other else.

Dhanendra : Silence (shouting), I won't hear anything,

(Moves angrily with the threatening stick, stamping steps—near to one or the other fish—they tremble in fear, walks briskly, looking around—picks up a chair suddenly—places it at the centre of stage— strikes on it violently three times—each time the other 3 persons stretch their backs and necks in utter pain.)
Rajkumari !

Sanajaobi : Yes, my Lord ?

Dhanendra : Is this a game of hide and seek ?

Sanajaobi : No, my Lord.

Dhanendra : "Found out"! (Shouts)
(Immediately exits with bag)

Sukumar *(Stretching body)* : How long have I slept ? I can't remember.

Sanajaobi : You have not yet slept sir.

Sukumar *(Looking at her face intently)* : Helen of Troy ! You have crossed the limit. It is come home to roost ! Feel tired must return home—*(after 2 or 3 steps)* where has the boy gone to?

Sanajaobi : To see a nude picture with some friends. *(Exit Sukumar, after a farewell stare at Iboyaima)*
(In the meantime Iboyaima sits on a chair—cleaning sweat all over his body with a napkin)

Iboyaima : Who are all those trespassers ?

Sanajaobi : They are all infidels in the garbs of pilgrims.

Iboyaima : It is a hair-raising experience, my heart pounded like a drum !

Sanajaobi : You have sweated out, but escaped unhurt. That is a joy of life. Be happy and don't worry.

Iboyaima : Thank you madam. I am cooling up.
(Babahan enters unannounced)

Babahan : After the rush hour melee arrives an ice-box.

Sanajaobi : Where from ?

Iboyaima : May be for packing fishes.

Babahan : A good fishing ground—eh !
(Exit on the right and Ibeton enters in the left and looks on a while)

Ibeton : Black-art and mantras in Manipur are powerful indeed !

Sanajaobi : What makes you come here, lady ?

Ibeton : Sister Rajkumari, I am looking about a stray bull. Someone is waiting at the shop, for buying on credit or paying off dues, please go and meet her.

Iboyai : Are they Leihao or Leibaklei ?

Ibeton : I don't know sir. (Follows him out of room)—Good Gods ! Why are sea sirens transported on the land ?

Sanajaobi : Off with you in silence. (Shout) (Walks up and down a while). New, depression sets in. Sure, it must be the plan of the two devils (shouts) Tomalo ! Babahan ! You have stolen the light from me. Yes, one of you shall be bound on the rocks, like Prometheus in the Greek legend. *(after relaxing on a chair a while)*

(Thinks aloud) Many days of disappointment, perhaps, suggested. To catch all three on the same day— but, by an irony of fate, I missed all ! *(Silence a while)* ....

— *Curtain* —

Act : 2—Scene : 1

Time : Spring evening

Place: Fullator, Cachhar—at the foot of a banyan tree.

There are two trunks bound with ropes. On one bedding Babahan sits—supporting the chin with 2 hands, Tomalo stands leaning on the tree, dumb-founded. He throws away a bamboo flute after puffing twice or thrice.

Tomalo : I, Tomalo, am a nobody.

Babahan : You are not a nobody—say—you are a worthy man.

Tomalo : No, I am a nobody, no person.

Babahan : You spell out the word Meeram.

Tomalo : On the straw bed of a rain soaked hut—"miyao, miyao"—fed like dogs and cats with the left overs from the table—running around and doing odd jobs—under carrot and stick rule, nothing to be proud of, what a luck !

Babahan : The luck of Rajkumari's husband, Tangang Tomalo, is not a nobody.

Tomalo : Rajkumari's servant, runner— away from the jaws of the serpent, exiled myself to Tripura and Tinsukia—now I might return to the jaws of the crocodile—a nobody.

Babahan : Add double e to m—mee, a to r-ra and add m you get "meeram"—a man of worth. Don't return to Imphal, if you are afraid of the crocodile. Spend this night at Jiribam, come tomorrow to Lakhipur as Gurujee Premananda Shwami ! we will welcome you with musical chorus, conch shell blowing and burning

torches and incense in adulation.

Tomalo : You wish to expose me a nobody to be ridiculed in public.

Babahan : Spell ram with only one a, did you ever learn the sound of double a ?

Tomalo : No, I did not.

Babahan : So you are not "Meeraam"—nobody, but Meeram—a man of worth. When you raise your index finger all the girls and young women of Lakhipur will dance and sing to your tune. To execute your order boys and girls (students) will remain waiting for the command. The fool and the cowards only say that this is an absurd world, no fit place for proper living. I have seen, friend Tomalo, we two are living and shall continue to live in glory.

Tomalo : After about 10 years' exile, what a vision has flared up before you today ?

Babahan : I am returning to my native Lakhipur after 10 years of self exile. I have earned neither money nor a name— nor even a woman to jeer at me. What should I take home less than wish fulfilling magic ring ?

Tomalo : Where from ?

Babahan : From you.

Tomalo : How ? (fumbling inside pockets)

Babahan : Gurujee, please go to Lakhipur tomorrow and give a music lesson. Let us start a Mahavidyalaya, an institute for arts. I shall teach martial arts, Yogic exercises and Manipuri black arts.

Tomalo : Are you earnest R.K. Marjit (a Traitor) ?

Babahan : Let the village be burnt up, let the doomsday come on earth—but we two should live.

(Tomalo shakes Babahan's hand & sings with him)

Remember a spelling lesson :
Double Ee to m give you mee
Single a to r gives short ra
No double a learnt we in school
Meeram, a worthy man am I.

I am not Meeraam—a nobody
only a single a to r
To spell out Meeram, a man of worth

Babahan : (Folding palms) Good bye ! I am to Lakhipur.

Tomalo : (Folding palms) : Bye ! I am to Jiribam, professor.

(Exit in different directions)

— Light Off —

Act : 2—Scene : 2

Morning, on a clean stage two young men Subol and Boyai in dhuti and kurta are singing as they decorate the stage, lay a big carpet—hang up festoon, etc... Ceremonial white dress and sect marks on the foreheads not to be avoided.

Song—

What a fraud ! What a bluff !
Two Engels out of the blue
will rain today cats N dogs as they sing.
Teach you sing, pay the fees
Award you degree, pay the fees
What a fraud ! What a bluff !
We don't trust, we can't pay
No frog sings sweet, holding a degree, sir.
Engels, teach us singing if you can
We won't learn, we can't pay.
(After them two girls, Jabanika and Indrani
in ceremonial white dress and sect marks—enter
singing a song. They bring candles, incense,
flower garlands, decorate the stage—lay a
white cover over the carpets...)

The Song—

It is a happy day for Lakhipur
Our songster master will arrive today
Our new master from Manipur
Be happy N hopeful, all ye maidens
Be learned or not, look pretty at least
Thou stranger, a son of the godland
Cast a charm on the hungry eyes of us damsels

Be happy N hopeful, ye all maidens
Down on earth, your dream will flower
Our songster master will arrive at Lakhipur,
Our new master from Manipur

(While the two girls are making garlands with flowers old Gaunbura and adult Beikuntha in white enter)

Gaunbura : Hallo ! Dear maidens, has your songster master arrived ? he sings with a heavenly voice— Babahan said.

Indrani : Not yet arrived Kaka.

Beikuntha : My daughters, hearing that a new young songster from the land of Sree Govindajee is arriving here, your are delighted in waiting. Well done, it is youngsters' duty to remain waiting.

Gaunbura : Beikuntha babu, what are the degrees the master holds ? Babahan praises him sky high.

Beikuntha : When the paddly fields are dried up and crack and cannot be cultivated for want of water, the master is engaged to invoke the rain goddess by singing a song in "Varsa Raga". When he starts singing, the rain clouds fly down to hear him sing, when he completes singing, torrents of rain flood the field, Babahan said.

Indrani : Yes, uncle. It is said that in the winter season when poor people shiver with cold and cannot sleep, the master songster sings a song in Basanta Raga which coddles them to sleep.

Gaunbura : In the modern age, talent does not count so much. Is he an M.A. ? Is he a doctorate degree holder in vocal or any instrumental music ? Our Mahavidyalaya in Lakhipur shall demand a higher class certificate.

Beikuntha : Dadajee, sure, he has a lot of certificates. whether he has bought them from bazar or picked them up from dust bins, I don't know.

Jabanika : Are certificates sold in the bazar of Manipur, uncle ?

Beikuntha : Maiden, nothing is impossible in the land of Sree Govindajee.

Indra : It is said that Matric certificate is sold at Rupees fifty only,

Rupees one hundred for B.A. and may be Rupees two hundred for M.A. degree.

Beikuntha : Our Babahan left Lakhipur for travelling round the world about ten years ago. He has collected a trunk load of certificates. He now wants to become an Acharyya in our Mahavidyalaya, a professor.

Gaunbura : A Professor !

Indra : What are the subjects he would teach ?

Beikuntha : Many subjects, his certificates and recommendation papers completely fill a trunk.

Gaunbura : Babahan of our Lakhipur ?

Beikuntha : Yes, sir.

Gaunbura : Very good, please tell me, in what subjects has he specialised ?

Beikuntha : Babahan is versed in quack remedies in witch-craft, in fortune telling, in theory and practice of Manipuri customs and traditions, arts and crafts. He is now doing some research work on the secret of using spinning wheel in match-making.

Gaunbura : Well done ! Well done ! Babahan of Lakhipur has now become a man.

(Two girls clap hands)

Indra : What about the certificates of our new master from Manipur ?

Jabanika : Besides his learning, we would rather like to known about his personality and manners.

Gaunbura : Correct, what are the qualifications of the other master ? We should also know in advance his personality and whether he deserves the fair of our Lakhipur.

Beikuntha : The other master is known as premananda Swami. His complexion is fine dark clouds, but his pair of eyes are as bright as the gemini stars—very attractive and the rows of his teeth are whiter than white flowers of the marriage garland.

Gaunbura : Never mind, the dark complexion,if the eyes and the teeth are bright. What about the certificates ?

Beikuntha : What should I say, Dadajee, he is versed in singing Sama Veda Songs, research scholar in Manipuri Love Songs and M.A. degree in carnatic music from Lucknow.

(Two girls clap)

Babahan : (Calls) Subol, Boyai ! Subol and Boyai (run in crying) : The master has arrived, the master has arrived.

Babahan : I told you, your preparation will not keep the time. Where are the torches and incense—blow the conch !

Gaunbura : Be ready, youngsters. Where is the garland ?

(All in hurry—Welcome Tomalo dressed like a Paramananda Swami in saffron colour—muslin cap, dhuti—long shirt—traditional welcome with lighted torch, incense, flowers garland, conch shell blowing)

Babahan : Yes, let us start the function. Mr. Gaunbura, the old man of Lakhipur is proposed as the President of the inaugural function of Sangeet Kala Mahavidyalaya.

Subol : I second the proposal.

Babahan : With the permission of the President, I am glad to introduce our present Chief Guest my friend, honourable Paramananda Swami, Shama Veda Geet Visarad, M.A. degree in carnatic music of Lucknow, Research Scholar in Modern Manipuri love songs—to you. He will most likely be appointed as the Professor of love songs in the music department of the Mahavidyalaya of Lakhipur. In his former life this gentleman, Tomalo by name, married one R.K. Sanajaobi, an unacknowledged queen of Beauty in Manipur and was awarded the title of Tangang (son-in-law of the king). As she was in the habit of awarding Tangang titles to young and smart youths, Tomalo surrendered the title to her and fled with me on world tour for some years. During the period he learnt music from Lucknow, has become a Jogin and women hater. It is fortunate for us that he agrees to join the Mahavidyalaya as a Professor of vocal music, Thank you all.

Gaunbura : Well, we have learnt much about him from advertising Agency. Now Shwamijee should convince the assembled audience by action i.e. by singing a song to prove his

worth.

Claps—Tomalo prepares to sing like a master-bows down to the gathering and starts singing a "Khyal".

Song :

Ah ah ah, eh eh eh
Ka kha, ga gha, ... nga
Pa pha, ba bha, ... ma
A—h, ha eh—hay
Is he the black pot ?
What a pity !
What a fool !
Cha chha, ja jha .... niya
Ta tha, da dha .... na
Ehi—oho
Not so ordinary,
The trick—the mimic !
Just see how he pretends
Oho ho ho, miyao miyao
Ja ra la—ha la wah
Sa sa ni dha—fie, fie !
An owl in the bush
Koo koo, hooting— .... !

(Claps of approval)

Guanbura : Well sung, all are delighted. Songster master is approved for the job. As Babahan also has applied for a teachership, he should also be interviewed now ? What will you say Beikintha babu.

Beikuntha : As he has applied for the professorship, he should undergo a test examination in brief, Babahan babu. Is it meeteirology that you offer to teach in the Mahavidyalaya?

Babahan : Yes sir, Kaka Mahasay.

Subol : Is it meteorology or Meeteirology ? Please explain, sir.

Babahan : Yes, almost the same.

Subol : How sir ?

Babahan : Almost the same in pronouncing them. Meteorology and Meeteirology. What do you students of Science mean by meteorology ?

Subol : The science which deals with the phenomena of the air, weather and weather conditions is meteorology.

Babahan : The science which deals with the phenomena of the Meitei language, customs and tradition is Meeteirology.

Boyai : Sir, what is the difference between Meetei and Meitei ? Which is correct ?

Babu : Meetei and Meitei—a little different in spelling. Both are correct.

Boyai : How are they derived—Meetei and Meitei ?

Babahan : Meetow tam hei Meetei. Imitator of other men—so meetei.

Boyai : What about Meitei ?

Babahan : Mei is fire. Meitei means fire user or light giver. Meiteis belong to a civilized group of people.

Boyai : I can't believe, sir.

Babahan : Then you can't secure good marks in the examination. I assure you Subol, Boyai; to respect the view of the experts is safe for you all.

(Subol and Boyai walk out)

Javanika Sir, what is the difference between Meiteilon and Manipurilon ?

Babahan : Our, language may be compared to a river. In the hilly stage, it may be named Meiteilon when the river flows in the plain, later it becomes Manipurilon. (Laughter—claps). Meiteilon is diluted with words from Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi, English, etc. to turn it Manipurilon.

Indra : What is Meitei Maiyokwa ?

Babahan : The charm for successful meeting face to face. It was practised by ancient Meiteis.

Indra : Is that useful ? Want to learn it.

Babahan : Very useful, if one chants the magic verse correctly. I shall teach you.

Jaba : Any proof of sucess, sir ?

Babahan : The wise King Solomon of Israel used it 1000 years before Christ—with much success. Helen of Troy, Cleopetra of

Egypt, Draupadi of Punjab, Mamata Begum of Agra and Moirang Thoibi of Manipur—all wore such a charm.

Beik : No limit of various changes in the course of time. Old customs and traditions and Meiteirology are also facing the stormy changes.

Babahan : Yes, sir. Meiteis should know themselves through their customs and traditions, arts and culture. Otherwise, this race of turn-coats will in time adopt a naked foreign culture and will vanish from earth.`(Claps)

Gaunbura : Well, let us now break the meet. Boys and girls you arrange for lodging and boarding of the teachers. If you want to learn the best, obey the teachers, love the teachers and render any service for their convenience. this is all, I have to say. Thank you.

(Gaunbura & Beikuntha go away)

Babahan : Swamijee, come on please, let us see the hermitage where you are to reside.

Tomalo : Where can we see the Ashram of Nalandar Baba ?

Indrani : Sir, let us pay a visit to the sacred place tomorrow. It is on the bank of the Barak river.

Tomalo : Where flows the Barak river ?

Javanika : Let us show you, come on please (They depart)

— *(Light off)* —

Act : 2—Scene : 3

The next day on the Barak river bank, Lakhipur Bazar. Subol and Boyai are talking as they walk.

Subol : It is a wonderful world Mr. Boyai. We have seen so many untrust-worthy fellows and heard so many absurd things. Is it a dream or reality ?

Boyai : Yesterday's master Swamijee and the Meiteirology of Pandit Babahan of Lakhipur ! Don't you mean them ?

Subol : Yes, no doubt, Is not that Sadhu a counterfeit coin ? Should we take Babahan's jokes seriously ?

Boyai : Friend Subol, it is true that we are living.

Subol : Upto now we have been living, but we don't know whether we shall live till tomorrow.

Boyai : To live until tomorrow, we should also make them live. Idle as we are, we should live pretending to learn some thing. They should be made to play the roles of trees and we should live on them as parasites or orchids. Otherwise our conscience will ask now and then the purpose of our living.

Subol : After seeing yesterday's black Tomal tree and bitter neem tree, the two creeper flowers have not seen us at all, the two pillars of Lakhipur, why ?

Boyai : They might also want to live.

Subol : Should we two like to commit suicide ?

Boyai : Instead of desiring to die, let us live by playing dissociation tactics or as wedges between them. The Sadhu is not a real Sadhu, the Pandit is not a Pandit, the creeper flowers should not avoid their familiar pillars.

Subol : Is it sure that they will pay a visit to Nalandar Baba by rowing a boat on the Barak river ?

Boyai : May be true, because they gave no information to us.

Subol : We don't like to believe it, but we must believe it.

Boyai : If we don't believe, we can't live.

(Beikuntha and Guanbura enter with sticks in their hands)

Gaunbura : Boys ! Where are your two masters ?

Boyai : We are also seeking uncle. Can't find them.

Beikuntha : Children say that they have vanished with the two girls. Whether they have vanished with the two girls whether they have gone to pay respects to Nalandar Baba or to play the game of hide and seek. We old men cannot make any reliable decision.

Subol : Dear uncle, we can't understand the present time. In the journey for paying homage to the Nalandar Baba, Boyai and myself should or should not be included, one can't say. Do the two masters deserve or not some cane lashes on their backs ? One can't say. the two girls may be devoted to the deity or to the men, no one can say. What we are saying about them may be due to jealousy or hatred or simply due to affection for the girls who should keep their normal conduct beyond doubt. Elders like Kaka may consider our attitude as good or evil. This world is full of strange dichotomies, sir.

Gaunbura : If you think in that way Mr. Subol, we don't know exactly why we come here with sticks in hand, whether for driving away wayward bulls or stray cow. If it is man, whom shall we drive away. Should we drive out the new comers or beat the old ones on their bare backs. Again there are two groups of man—male and female. Whom should we lay blame on ? We are nonplussed.

Beikuntha : Dada Mahasaya, if we think a little more deeper, we can't say why we established Sangeet Mahavidyalaya to teach the children Meeteirology. Was it to make their dresses and make-up improve or to make the journey to Godland shorter ? We did it without proper consideration.

Gaunbura : If you reason that way, Beikuntha Babu, are we living in Lakhipur ? Or is Lakhipur living in us ? Is this land lying in the name of Lakhipur or is the name Lakhipur lying on this land ?

Beikuntha : A thing and its name is not the same. Babahan was a Lakhipuri 10 years ago, is he a Manipuri now because he resided there for 10 years ? Or is he an amphibious creature like a drake.

Subol : Ducks of Manipur might have extradited him to Lakhipur. The thing and its name is some times contradictory.

Boyai : If we continue the talking in this trend, our master songster Paramananda Swami was known by the name Tangang Tomalo in Manipur. If sister Rajkumari Sanajaobi turns up here and sees this master, saint tuned Saffron Swamijee, can she arrest and punish him as her lost husband Tomalo found ?

Subol : Name is most misleading, it is better not to have one at all. *(Babahan, Tomalo and the two girls in ceremonial Manipuri dresses, white clothes—with sindoor marks on the foreheads—carrying some flowers and twigs, return from Nalandar Baba Ashram. Those who are waiting for them look at them curiously)*

Babahan, Tomalo : Namaste Gaunbura ! Namaste Kaka Beikuntha.

Beikuntha : Namaskar, pilgrims, you are back from the Nalandar Baba. Have you enjoyed the journey ? Are you favoured with any boon or blessings ?

Tomalo: The scenery is sublime. the experience is unforgettable.

Babahan : We forgot asking for boons, we should venture again.

Gaunbura : Maidens, how did you enjoy the journey ? Are you quite satisfied ?

Indra : It is very interesting Kaka. We also heard some songs that thrill the heart.

Jabanika : Had we been there longer, we would have enjoyed much more.

Subol : On this side of the wall we missed your presence, and with much anxiety and despair searched for you

all through the Panchavati forest.

Boyai : Since you made the journey stealthily, the sudden loss struck us like a bolt from the heaven.

Jaba : We are sorry, we did not send the information of our journey in advance to the newspaper press.

Gaunbura : To enjoy the spring of life in time is not so bad. What do you think Beikuntha Babu ? Now we can't ....

Beikuntha : Yes of course, Dada-moshai our age does not move backward like a crab. Still to enjoy the youthful pleasures in full is neither good nor bad.

Gaunbura : Yes, even to us elders, to enjoy a grand feast whenever invited to, is neither good nor bad.

Subol : It is neither good nor bad for disappointed youngsters to be or not to be angry. For those youngsters also who got appointments, it is neither good nor bad to rejoice and behave arrogantly.

Boyai : Male masters and maiden students going together to a picnic or to a pilgrimage is neither good nor bad.

Babahan : Male and female student s going together on an excursion is neither good nor bad. To include teachers among them is also neither good nor bad.

Beikuntha : It is also often heard that in Manipur, teachers marry their female students and female teachers also get married to male students sometimes. That is neither good nor bad, I think.

Gaunbura : Beikuntha Babu, it is also heard of Manipur that Old man sometimes married a girl and old woman often has affairs with a youth. To comment on the morality of such a marriage, if we consider deeply, I should say—it si neither bad nor good.

Indrani : Is the question of good or bad for the individual or for the society ? Does the society exist for men ? Or do men live for the society ? Suppose a female student gets married to a teacher, the students may be angry, the teachers also may be angry, the society may also raise objections to it ; but the newly married couple will thank god. Should they be

rightly angry with the society or the society with them ?

Jaba : Suppose a girl and an old man got engaged for some convenience or other and married after much deliberation in the simple Gandharba style. In that event will the youngsters be angry and the elders laugh ? Or will the elders be angry and the youngsters laugh or weep ?

Tomalo: There are in our society, elders and youngsters who are pitiful and sympathetic, who are argumentative and quarrelsome for personal profit or interest, some men in the society laugh or weep, work or fight, agitate and raise grievance; some gain and laugh, some lose and weep. The whole society remains cool and calm like a big sea after a storm.

Gaunbura : Boys and girls, would you stay here to suffer the stormy winds that may rouse the waves on the sea or return home silently like the calm water of a pond ?

Beikuntha : I don't know whether it is good to make a noise or to remain dumb and silent like the sand. (Elders depart)

Subol : It is time to depart for me, those who think otherwise, may continue preparation for happy union. (Goes off).

Boyai : It is my turn to leave (Off)

(The two girls also leave after glancing at the masters who remain dumbfounded).

Tomalo: How now Headmaster ? How should we continue the story? Should we vanish like 2 lumps of earth dropped into water ? Or should we get the songs sung together on the Barak river—recorded in a tape, so that we may respond to any demand for encore with a loud speaker.

Babahan : They are intoxicated with the songs which they want to be privatised. Let us oblige them with a graduation certificate to each.

Toma : You please do that, I can't. I am afraid of the probable reactions.

Babahan : Why should you fear? They are not Sanajaobi's.

Toma : All women are Sanajaobis, I am tired of them. There is no

peace in family life. Besides, there is a reactionary group in Lakhipur.

Babahan : The bitter attitude is not Lakhipur. Some youngsters, of course, might be disappointed, we must not be afraid of them.

Toma : You try to fulfil your own desire. Leave me alone.

Babahan : Without your help, I can't achieve success. Two and two makes four by addition or multiplication, number enhances courage.

Toma : I can play the supporting role but not that of the hero.

Babahan : Be courageous like a man, I am here in Lakhipur by your side, whom should you fear? We should not recede – fare you well. (Departs)

Tomalo: First a sitting room, then lying down!

(Kadam enters in police uniform)

Kadam : One thing please ?

Tomalo: Who are you boy ? What do you want ? Are you from Manipur, it seems so ?

Kadam: I am R.K. Sanajaobi's messenger from Manipur. Where can I find Tangang Tomalo's lodging in Lakhipur ?

Toma : Are you acquainted with Tomalo ? Can you recognise him when you see him ?

Kadam : I don't know him quite well.

Tomalo: He is no more in Lakhipur, went away to Nabadwip yesterday to adopt the ways of a Sanayasin and then he would go to Brindaban, he said.

Kadam : Sister Sanajaobi told me to bring him home with me.

Tomalo: The Vaisnab might have reached now to Nabadwip and no telephone to contact him.

Kadam: Sister Sanajaobi told me if he does not agree to go with me, she would go personally to arrest him. It is better to return to roost for a welcome respite.

Tomalo: To whom are you advising?

Kadam : To Tangang Tomalo.

Tomalo: But, Tangang Tomalo has gone to Brindaban.

Kadam : Even then, sister Sanajaobi warned him to return to roost to avoid undesirable insults. She said so intimately.

Tomalo: Do you know Tangang Tomalo?

Kadam: I don't know.

Tomalo: He has gone away, what is the use of giving the message to me.

Kadam: As the message is very important to me, I must deliver it.

Tomalo: What is the benefit of telling it to me? I won't go to Brindaban and I won't see him.

Kadam: If sister Sanajaobi comes here, she would be very angry. She is a hot-tempered woman, we fear her.

Tomalo: Tell her he cannot be found, went away to Nabadwip. That is all, you leave me.

Kadam: I can't carry lies as news. I did not see him going to Nabadwip with my eyes.

Tomalo: I saw him going away with my own eyes.

Kadam: Then let us go together and please tell her that you saw him go away.

Tomalo: Why should I go?

Kadam: To say - you saw him go away.

Tomalo : Why should I bother? That will bring no benefit to me.

Kadam : If sister Sanajaobi comes here, somebody might get insulted.

Tomalo : Who is that somebody?

Kadam : Tangang Tomalo.

Tomalo : I am not Tomalo, go away, I don't like to hear you.

Kadam : Even then, as I should do my duty. I am delivering the message. If Sanajaobi comes here, she will rope him in to get her linen washed. To avoid the mishap, I am heralding the message.

Tomalo : What is the relevance of breaking the message to me?

Kadam : I have completed my task.

Tomala : Give the information to a banyan tree instead of to me.

Kadam : The banyan tree will not say he has gone to Nabadwip.

Tomalo : Yes, you leave me, I shall write to Tomalo giving him the information.

Kadam : Rajkumari Sanajaobi may arrive here before you write to him.

Tomalo : Damn care, let the dragon arrive. What can I do ?

Kadam : It is better to return to Manipur.

Tomalo : Whom do you mean ?

Kadam : Tangang Tomalo.

Tomalo : But, I am not Tangang Tomalo.

Kadam : Even then, I should name him.

Tomalo : Just go and tell her that he might leave for Manipur the day after tomorrow.

Kadam : Then I will wait upto day after tomorrow so that I might accompany him.

Tomalo : Whom are you waiting for ?

Kadam : Waiting for Tangang Tomalo.

Tomalo : He might not like to accompany you.

Kadam : Then, I will follow his trail. (Goes off)

Tomalo : What a policeman is he ? He deserves a prize from Sanajaobi. He is just the chap to run her errand.

(Light off, it is night –Tomalo dresses in saffron like a Jogi Subol and Boyai enter in hot temper – calling)

Subol : Masterjee! (Knocks) Is Masterjee out ?

Boyai : Have they gone to picnic. It is dark already.

Subol : Masterjee!

Tomalo : I am coming out, who are you ?

(Students bow down)

Halo! Subol, Boyai, what do you want from me ?

Subol : Masterjee, we are angry with you.

Boyai : Not simply angry, it is burning.

Tomalo : What wild fire have ignited you ?

Subol · You have started the wild fire, sir.

Boyai : All Lakhipur gets heated, sir.

Subol : Why are masters so partial to students male and female ?

Boyai : Some questions are known to female students before examination, whereas the male students are deprived of such a favour.

Subol : Female students are allowed to copy in the examination hall and to consult with the teachers. To us, male students; teachers shout "Don't talk, don't copy, can't consult during

examination." Is that the moral virtue of a teacher ?

Tomalo : My sons, don't tell a lie, I am no sinner, I love all students male or female, I rule by only one moral law. Don't believe rumours.

Subol : If we find out evidence of partiality, teachers all will be disgraced.

Boyai : Please consider that minutely. If dishonesty is found out, sure disgrace to the teachers.

(The two walk out)

Tomalo : I love all students male and female, instead of being grateful to me, they kill my reputation, I had an old girl friend who gave me no peace in life. I find the life of a teacher also is not immune to attack. Is Babahan my fried or enemy. Are my wife, my students, my well wishers my enemies ? Do I live to be happy or worry ?

(Indrani and Jabanika return from a marriage party, well dressed and present some sweets to their master)

Indrani : Masterjee, you should kindly give us pass marks in examination.

Jabanika : We must be favoured each with a degree, sir.

Tomalo : Those who study seriously will pass and get the degree. You two seem to have been to a marriage ceremony, as you are in your best dresses. You please stand as models, I will draw a pathetic picture.

Indrani : What are you drawing, sir ? Will that be important for examination.

Tomalo : Yes, it will be an important question.

Jabanika : How should we pose, sir ?

Tomalo : You, Jabanika, are to pose as a lotus flower in half bloom. Sit on this cane stool.

Indrani : How should I, sir ?

Tomalo : You are to play the lotus leaf, open your umbrella.

Indrani : (Smiling) Can we play it ?

Tomalo : Why not. I will teach you and give direction.

(Takes out a cane stool, drawing paper, brushes, paints –

easel and canvas, etc Jabanika is made to sit on the stool with two hands folded on her head like a blooming lotus flower, Indrani is allowed to stand bending like a lotus leaf with the umbrella opened slightly over Jabanika's head Jabanika sits in a devotional mood As he directs, the two starts muttering in tune

The lotus leaf brags
The lotus flower is in half bloom

Tomalo (To Indrani) Produce your left hand backward, with your right hand raise the umbrella slanting, eyes on the blooming flower with a smile Yes

Jabanika How should I do sir ? Am I a budding flower ?

Tomalo No, you are almost in full bloom Clap your two palms on your head, concentrate your mind on a deity or a lover as you like (Tuning) —

In deep devotion
Longing for the goal of love

Yes, together each of you dwell on the mood suggested Ready! Start action! (He sings)

The lotus leaf brags
The lotus flower is in half bloom
In deep devotion
Longing for the goal of love
(Don't laugh)
Oh, you black bee, heavy bottom
You are calling on at the wrong hour
(Sorry)
Off with you, don't buzz here
That may spoil the dream of the devotee
(The two girls laugh)

Tomalo Don't laugh, stay, for a while as you did I am drawing your portraits on the canvass Give attention, this time – no laugh – Ready!

They resume their poses as directed earlier – Jabanika murmurs something & shuts her eyes – Indrani says, "Hallo"!

Tomalo Sings again. *(Stage floods with red light)*

The Song :

The lotus leaf brags
The lotus flower is in half bloom
In deep devotion
Longing for the goal of love
Oh, you! Black bee, heavy bottom,
You are calling on at the wrong hour
Sorry!
Off with you, don't buzz here
That may spoil the dream of the devotee.

(Subol and Boyai run in, look around angrily)

Subol } : Are you driving us out, sir?
Boyai } Is it private tuition ?

Tomalo : No, not driving you out. It is a part of the lyric. You may join if you like. I am picturing a scene to be drawn on the canvass.

Subol : We should join in.

Boyai : Are there any role for us ?

Tomalo : Why not, come on. You Subol, play the role of the black bee and buzz over the blooming flower. "Open the red lips please." Boyai, you stand here with a catapult, you are to shoot a bullet at the black bee. Aim correctly. Ready, all of you, Action!

Tomalo(Sings) : Oh you,
Catapult toting brother
Drive away the black bee
His moped screeches

Boyai : Should I shoot now ?

Tomalo(Sings) : Yes, the catapult shoots a bullet with a bang!
Alas! What a terror and pity!
Hit is the prudish
Blossom in prime time
Cut is the long, long neck to size
On the water floats the red lips

Pouting for a kiss
The lotus leaf breaks down
sobbing and shedding tears

(Jabanika falls on the ground, Indrani cries – Tomalo goes with a brush to draw on the canvas – They look on)

Subol : Excuse me sir, let us redo it. We are not satisfied.

Boyai : We committed some mistakes, let us repeat it to avoid misrepresentation.

Two girls : We are tired sir. Let us not re-enact.

Subol : Is the Masterjee your private property ?

Tomalo : (Smiling) Shut up, no barking. Resume your poses, it should be the final taking. Ready, everyone of you.

(Against musical setting, Tomalo starts singing again)

(When Indrani poses uttering 'hello' and glancing at Jabanika who sits on the cane tool with clasped palms raised on the head. Subol buzzes with his fingers fluttering over the head of Jabanika and Boyai aiming at Subol.)

The song :

The lotus leaf brags
The lotus flower is in half bloom
In deep devotion
Longing for the goal of love
Oh, you – heavy bottom black bee
you are calling on at the wrong hour.
Sorry!
Off with you, don't buzz here
That may spoil the dream of the devotee.
Oh, you! Catapult toting brother
Drive away the black bee
his moped screeches shrilly.
Catapult shoots a bullet with a bang!

(Jabanika drops on the ground)

Alas! What a horror! What a pity!
Hit is the prudish blossom in prime time.
Cut is the long, long neck to size.

On the water floats the red lips pouting for a kiss
The lotus leaf breaks down sobbing and shedding tears.

Tomalo : Stay a while in your respective positions. Subol, black bee, duck down to avoid the bullet, Catapult Boyai, regret on your misfire, Jabanika, you swing your head as if floating on water, Indrani, you kneel down and cry one minute please

(Tomalo takes paper and pencil and stands at a distance – observes them and makes some sketches. Enter Gaunbura, Beikuntha and Babahan).

Gaunbura : My god, you are all here enacting some play! We have in vain searched for you all hill side and lake side pastures and fields and forests.

Beikuntha : Boys and girls, your behaviour has crossed the danger level. You went away to see a marriage ceremony in the afternoon, even after nightfall you don't return. Are you becoming migratory birds ?

Gaunbura : Painting, singing, music, Meeteirology was taught in the morning and afternoon. Now even play acting is taught in the night. We don't know what it is – a matter of laughter or tears.

Beikuntha : Should we scold or rejoice ? Should we approve or condemn their conduct ? We are not quite sure.

Indrani : We are learning a piece of song and enacting a scene for representation on the canvass.

Beikuntha : Shut up, don't babble back without listening.

Jabanika : What is the harm, kaka, in learning an art ? We wonder why the elders discourage us by scolding, instead of praising us.

Gaunbura : Your way of learning, your interest in the arts of black bee buzzing, of hide and seek, of cat and mouse, of wild dancing before forest deity. Modern license in learning anything without restriction surprises us the aged and we are induced to become younger.

Beikuntha : No more arguing, go back home just now. Learn your

licentious arts in the morning or afternoon Modern Newspapers are never tired of reporting scandalous hide and seek games. Just go back home, are you underteen boys and girls ?

Gaunbura : Go back home, at once. It is becoming darker.

(All move away except Tomalo and Babahan They look at each other – face to face – in silence for a while)

Tomalo : Dear Babahan ? What are you, I can't understand!

Babahan : Gurujee, I am your own good self.

Tomalo : What are the two elders saying ? Are they angry with or laughing at us ?

Babahan : They are bargaining for higher price of the girls.

Tomalo : In what market ?

Babahan : I demanded them as free gifts to the teachers.

Tomalo : I fear woman to live with more than a snake.

Babahan : They are not Rajkumari Sanajaobi. They are flowers like champaka, nageshwar and ketuki. Their scent is retained by the pillows for a long time.

Tomalo : You pluck one for your own self. Don't bother for me

Babahan : The pair cannot be separated.

Tomalo : Please don't involve me or else I will vanish in thin air.

Babahan : A friend in need is a friend indeed.

Tomalo : Are you a friend or a enemy ? Is the help for gain or loss ? I am doubtful. Any unpleasant thing may befall me, unlucky as I am. Separated from Sanajaobi, music and painting are my two wives. There is no need of keeping and feeding a wife. Please don't involve me in the negative activities of life. I want to live as an artist.

Babahan : Should we now break up our friendship ? Will people believe that we have been separated after so many years. Please give me three day's time, after which let us announce our separation.

Tomalo : In these three days are you getting me killed ?

Babahan : In these three days let each of us two be garlanded by two girls who are not snakes. (Goes off).

Tomalo : How dangerous it will be to be friends with an imposter!

(Enter his room collecting the canvass, painting materials and brushes. He hums the tune of the song, "The lotus leaf brags" ... Enter Sanajaobi in saree and goggles following police Kadam in uniform. Gaunbura in disguise stealthily leads them and gestures Kadam to call out and depart).

Kadam : Tangang Tomalo! Do you hear ? Tangang Tomalo!

Tomalo : Tangang is no more here, I said. Who are the other fellow? Please sit down on the chair

(Pretends not to recognise Sanajaobi).

Kadam : Out or in, I should call.

Sanajaobi : I don't come to sit, I want to arrest a man.

Tomalo : Who is that man ?

Sanajaobi : My man, Tangang Tomalo.

Tomalo : Tangang Tomalo has adopted Vaisnabism and gone on pilgrimage to Nabadwip and Brindaban.

Sanajaobi : Let him go, who has gone away. He who does not go, should go with me. There are many duties to be performed by a man who plays the role of a father.

Tomalo : My name is Premananda Swami. I am serving as teacher of Sangeet Kala Mahavidyalaya of Lakhipur.

Sanajaobi : That is something nothing. As a father of the 3 children left in Manipur, you have to prosecute some maintenance cases on behalf of the 3 children. Let us go just now. Delay will only incur insult.

Tomalo : None of the 3 children is my child. Your goodself and my poorself are separated. One needs no help from the other. Please think that I am no more.

Sanajaobi : Some hired witnesses, have given testimony that you are the father of the 3 children. If you can disprove the false statements in the court, we shall win the maintenance suit and harvest a good sum of money.

Tomalo : I am a falsely declared father, benami pattadar of the children. Please give away the children to their respective fathers who are the real cultivators. That is all.

Sanajaobi : That is true, but the difficulty is, to convince the court of the truth. The miserly big fishes denied the fatherhood, so

your evidence or even your blood test will be necessary for exposing the liars. Why don't you understand the difficulty ? You will not be asked to bear the burden of maintaining the children.

Tomalo : Sorry, I can't help you, madam. When the Sahebs, you admired, deserted you; please don't blame me, a poor coolie.

Sanajaobi : If big fishes are not available coolie or malee, any fry may be promoted to a hero status. However, dark his complexion may be, his teeth are shining. Is not it so Kadam ?

Kadam : If this fellow turns into a Saheb, he will speak only white lies.

Sanajaobi : Kadam, have you got married ?

Kadam : Not yet, madam.

Sanajaobi : Can you play the role of a Saheb.

Kadam : I am a man of one word. Poor as I am, I won't try to escape from duty, saying I am not the Tangang.

Sanajaobi : Good, your name will be included in the waiting list. Gurujee Premananda Swami, pack up, let us go. Without my permission you have altered your name, what are you thinking about, Tangang Tomalo ? It is getting late, let us go ?

Tomalo : I cannot go, madam.

Sanajaobi : You can't refuse, I shall take the help of the law. Follow me in obligation. You have no problem to face except to say the truth - nothing but the truth that "They are not my children". That is all. We shall dispose of the 3 children to the three Sahebs who will pay as maintenance cost three lacs of rupees. You must give evidence in the court, for which I will pay you either in cash or in kind i.e. I will promote you to real Sahebhood by God. Make haste, give your final decision at once or the chance will go to Kadam.

Tomalo : I can't oblige you madam, even if you threaten to kill me.

Sanajaobi : Kadam, bring out your knife, this man is too wayward to live, he should be given forced leave from the land of the

living beings. (Kadam gives her a knife) You are to be on the alert. (Kadam responds) Tangang Tomalo, do you want a weapon to defend yourself ?

Tomalo : I cannot go, madam.

Sanajaobi : Do you think you will be able to continue your stay in Lakhipur.

Tomalo : If I can;t stay here, I will prefer to go on pilgrimage as a Sanayasi to sacred places.

Sanajaobi : I saved you from starvation, I brought you up as an artist. You should not forget your obligation to me. If you are not a beast, you should not desert me in time of need.

Tomalo : I served you as best as I could, while I was with you. Now I want freedom, I am not a slave. Please depend on your big boy friends rather than on me. The old time is no more. I now declare I am free from the clutches of the sorceress.

Sanajaobi : No, you cannot be released now. All the big bulls here are on my side. I shall get you kidnapped by conjuring up the spirits from the Barak river. Let us see who can protect you, beware. Come on Kadam. (Go off).

Tomalo : (Standing dumb-founded) There is no evil, a devil can't do. Oh God, for what wrongs committed by me, I have to face these unfavourable vibrations!

(Enters inside – depressed, after a while sound of dog barking, owls hooting, is heard against the silence of the night. 4 ducoits in masks enter stealthily, they are none but Subol, Boyai, Gaunbura and Beikuntha in disguise. The stage is darkened. They enter the bed room of Tomalo, they overpower him and bind his hand and foot with ropes, carry him out to be dumped into Ngabongkhao, a course cloth bag).

Tomalo : What make you catch and bind me like a cock; what wrong have I done ? Won't you please tell me ? Are you all the inhabitants of Lakhipur ? Or are there any from Manipur ? If you will kill me, tell me please the reason why you should. I want to die after knowing it. Why are you so cruel? Where are you taking me to ?

Subol : (Altering voice) We are outing on a picnic.

Tomalo : Where and with whom ?

Subol : On the Barak river, the girls are waiting there.

Boyai : (Altering voice) They want to listen to sweet songs; we should leave quickly.

Tomalo : What did Babahan say about me ? What are the faults he inflicted upon me ?

Beikuntha : (Altering voice) It is getting late. Dump him in the bag. *(While they are dumping him in the bag Sanajaobi and Kadam run in to save him).*

Sanajaobi : (Pretending to weep) What is the matter with you, sirs ?

Gaunbura : (Alter voice) It is a bag of fraud or swindle to be thrown away into the Barak river.

Sanajaobi : Kindly allow me to see the content inside. (weeping)

Gaunbura : What is your concern, woman ?

Sanajaobi : I have lost my man, (sobs) if it is him, I will pay his worth or ransom at the market rate.

Gaunbura : How many rupees can you pay ? Are you ready to pay Rs. 400 ?

Sanajaobi : If he is my lost husband, I will pay the sum, sir.

Gaunbura : You should not request for reducing the amount.

Sanajaobi : I won't do that.

Gaunbura : Show him to her. (opening & showing him)

Sanajaobi : (Crying) What has happened to you my dear ? My beloved drake; how have you been caught in the hunters trap! What a pitiful sight I have seen today! (sobs)

Beikuntha : Keep silent, if the neighbourhood over hears, everything will be spoilt.

Gaunbura : Pay the ransom, and take him away.

Sanajaobi (pays Rs. 400) embraces Tomalo lovingly, Gaunbura and party go away, Kadam hangs up the bag, enters Tomalo's room, carry away some goods, they three hastily move away)

—The light darkens—

Early morning, Indrani & Jabanika run in weeping – calling – Masterjee! Gurujee!

Babahan : (Runs in) Gurujee, Gurujee, I should report to the Police Station.

The two girls weep, the background music sings – "Hit is the blossom in the prime time Cut is the long long neck to size ...."

— *(Curtain)*

Act–3

Three years after returning from Lakhipur, one afternoon, Tomalo, sitting on a mat, is smoking tobacco from a bamboo hookah. He looks on the mirror placed before him. He puts on a dhoti and a short sleeved shirt. He looks like an old man with a napkin on his shoulder. The light on stage darkens gradually as if evening is setting in. There are two cane stools and one chair in the veranda of Manipuri wooden house.

Tomalo : (Looking at his image on the mirror and erecting the back-bone) You Tomalo, it is only three years since you returned from Lakhipur, you are old, cart bullock, If Babahan sees you, he will ridicule you saying that you are promoted to grand-fatherhood, surmounting fatherhood. (Getting up – calls) Sanajaobi, Rajkumari[1] has the fishing lady of the dry lake, gone to catch fishes ? Rajkumari!

Sanajaobi : (From behind) Miyao! (like a cat) (Tomalo is startled, looks on the luxuriously dressed and decorated old girl – in silence) Like a cock crowing at intervals, why do you call me Sanajaobi, Sanajaobi (gold) ? Do you want to make me turned into a necklace, old man ?

Tomalo : This old girl is so foul-mouthed, fetch the stick of the old man!

Sanajaobi : (In a sweet tone) What will you do with that, please ?

Tomalo : I want to test the truth of a maxim by Bertrand Russel

Sanajaobi : What is the maxim ?

Tomalo : Dogs and women are best disciplined by caning. I want to test the truth.

Sanajaobi : That can be done in the future, I have an important case to be settled at Lamphelpat court today. On my return, I will buy your coat, trouser and neck-tie to make you a young man. Please cook at sun-set the meal, specially the fish

dishes nicely. Early to bed and early to rise is the way to be healthy, wealthy and wise.

(Leaves him, planting a rose on his ear)

Tomalo : If I lash her legs and back with a fine cane, the painfully hurt marks may be recorded indelibly on my heart. To please my hand should I whip and cut the leaves of the arum lily ?

(Standing a while in silence, he sings the lines)

The song :

Oh yes, it is the arum lily,
That grows by the side of the dirty canal.
You are not eaten by the bullock
That relishes even the banana leaves
Thrown away with leftovers.
But beautiful is your yellow flower
The harbinger of your ruddy fruit.
On yes, it is the arum lily
That grows by the side of the dirty canal.
Lose not, remain growing
You will be plucked gladly by maidens to feed the pigs
Grow on arum lily,
Continue to live gayly
You fulfil, no doubt, the appetence of life

(Kadam in dhoti and vest enters, hears the last part of the song).

Kadam . Tangang songster, why did you not come in the morning for singing a piece of song at the ritual of the dead ? What is the matter with you ?

Tomalo : I feel indisposed to any work other than watching and caring for Sanajaobi.

Kadam : As an artist you should render your service to the society. There will come a time when you will be invited to sing professionally in marriage and Sradha Ceremonies.

Tomalo : I am loath to do any other work whatever.

Kadam : You cannot avoid social duties. Now-a-days singers and drummers who are well recognised by the society are well paid.

Tomalo : I don't care for all that. Please leave me alone.

Kadam : Please go to sing a involcatory song before listening to sacred book reading at my home.

Tomalo : Are you accustomed to sacred book listening ritual Mr. Kadam ?

Kadam : Mother forced me to do so to ward off the curses of being a policeman. It won't take much time, come on please.

Tomalo : You don't know me, your Tangang. I am now old and indisposed.

Kadam : I was the man who saved your soul from the jaws of the crocodile at Lakhipur. Have you forgotten that ?

Tomalo : Only fools count on the return of their services rendered to the deserved. I am now in no mood of accounting for old services.

Kadam : That is why, old man, you are serving an old witch as your wife. Babahan with a pretty girl from Lakhipur has arrived at Imphal.

(Left him dumbfounded)

Tomalo : (Thinking aloud) Babahan with Indrani – and myself – *(holding the flower on the ear and looking at it – sings)*

The song :

How can I forget that,
How can I ?
Boating on the river Barak,
Laughing away the scandal mongers,
We reached the Narandar bank,
Why did you go there ?
Don't ask me the why, I don't know.
Your eyes glanced at me,
In response my eyes and lips smiled yes.
How can I forget that, how can I ?
Breaking out of the golden shackles

I wished to follow the light of your eyes.
Why did the cruel catapult slam a shot ?
God only knows the why of it.
Wings being clipped,
I fell down, a black bird inside the cage.
Being hopeless and so lifeless
I was sunk in the washing tub.
How can I stand it, how can I ?

NB. Smiling Jabanika may be shown in a corner of the stage with a spot light.

(Jabanika vanishes – wiping tears, Tomalo with bamboo hookah enters inside house – Entering Babahan and Indrani saw his back).

Babahan : Hallo, big uncle – please, big uncle! (Tomalo Vanishes)

Indrani : Is his father still alive ?

(Tomalo comes out bending like an aged)

Tomalo : Who are you boy ? Do you call me ? What do you want ?

(They look at each other in silence for a while)

Babahan : Big uncle, we come from Lakhipur to see Manipur.

Tomalo : Are you only two ?

Indrani : We are three, but the other is lurking somewhere timidly.

Tomalo : Whom do you want and why ?

Indrani : Is not this Gurujee Premananda Swami's home ?

Tomalo : No, this is Sanajaobi's home.

Babahan : Where has Gurujee gone to ?

Tomalo : People say that he was cut into pieces and dumped into a sack and thrown away to the Barak river.

Indrani : Let the dead sink, the living young Masterjee should accompany us. (Smiling)

Tomalo : Where are you going to, maiden ? I am Tomalo's father.

Indrani : To picnic on the Barak river.

Tomalo : Sorry, it will not be proper at this age of mine. How many are your companions ? (Indrani looks at Babahan)

Babahan : We are 4 in number including yourself, big uncle.

Tomalo : Who is the other one ?

Indrani : Jabanika is waiting for us on the river bank.

Tomalo : (Silent a while) Who is Jabanika ?

Indrani : The lotus flower in half bloom. She can't forget the song sung on the Barak river. Longing to rehear the song, she followed us and arrived at Imphal.

Tomalo : Youngsters! What will you gain by ridiculing me, an old man, with the false romantic dream ? Fortunate as you are, remain young for all time, why do you jeer at me, the aged?

Babahan : gurujee, please don't disbelieve, us,.

Indrani : Please dress up like a young man and sing the song of the Barak river. Then you will come to understand whether our words are true or not.

(Tomalo enters into the house and changes his clothes)

Babahan : Our gurujee is speedily ageing. I doubt if Jabanika will see him to love.

Indrani : Not so old, frustration in love erodes his look. when he sees the lotus blossom, he will turn into a young honey-bee.

Babahan : I don't know if sister Rajkumari is still in the habit of catching big fishes!

(Tomalo comes out in coat and trouser and holding a red neck-tie).

Tomalo : I don't know if such a suit for the young will become me or not!

Babahan : Why not sir ? (The two make him up)

Tomalo : Where should we picnic ?

Indrani : In a boat on the Barak river. (Imitates rowing a boat).

Tomalo : How many are we ?

Indrani : Please sing the old song sung on the Barak river, the absentee will appear in flesh. She did not attend fearing least the song might have been forgotten.

Babahan : I assure you Gurujee, please come on, step down on the boat.

(They stand in a line, Tomalo in the front and Babahan in the back rowing oars)

Tomalo : (Starts singing) Oh, you .... Wayward youth, River Barak!

Jabanika : *(A spot light flashes on her in a corner of the down stage right).* Do you call me, Masterjee ?

Tomalo : Yes sure, come on.

Indrani : Don't fight shy, get in the boat. Please help her, sir.

(Tomalo holds her hands and helps her get inside the boat next to him).

Tomalo : (Sings) The Song

Oh, you ....
Wayward youth River Barak
You spring front the hills of Manipur
You flow today freely in Lakhipur
Meandering and revelling in a zigzag course
The little love boat sails on
The good oar bangs noisily on water
Thinking nobody sees them,
Nobody knows them neither –
It is a hide and seek game!
But why on the tree top
"Ting-gong Kang-gong" *Cries aloud
"Baw-ko-tha-kaw" **
Such a joy, such a delight
Where will one get ?
It will never happen again, never!
Propel the boat love oarsmen
We should reach our goal, the Narandar Isle
Forget all horrors and hindrances
It is our own day – today!

(The last four lines may be sung together. Colour lights and varied musical notes – should support this scene. It is Tomalo's day dream!)

(Tomalo sees Sanajaobi with Dhanendra now D.C. Spot lighted)

Sanajaobi : Wait a minute, who are you all ? Where are you going to ? You too, Babahan ?

Babahan : We are on a picnic, madam.

Sanajaobi : Where ? How long ?

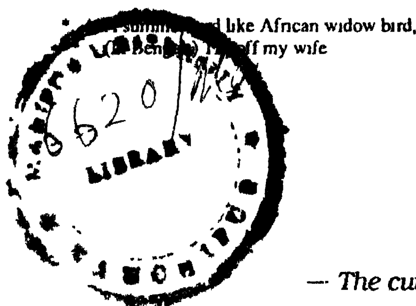
Tomalo : To search the limit of life. Please don't prevent us. We have all registered the partnership agreement.

Sanajaobi : Do as you like, I am not preventing. I have also fulfilled my wishes. Your brother-in-law's wife has returned to her heavenly home and I am promoted in her place. Your provident fund is here. (Gives a bundle of notes to him collecting from Dhanendra D.C. and pick up a gold chain from her neck and given it to Tomalo).

Sanajaobi : Place it on your partner's neck.

(Tomalo takes and does an advised, they bow down at the feet of Dhanendra and Sanajaobi – return to their places in the boat. Dhanendra and Sanajaobi raising their hands exit. Tomalo shuts his eyes – Babahan, Indrani, & Jabanika move away in slow motion and vanish. Tomalo opens his eyes and looks around).

Tomalo : This is the happiness of the low-brows. A moment in romantic dream.



* ... like African widow bird,
(Bengali) ... off my wife

— *The curtain* —